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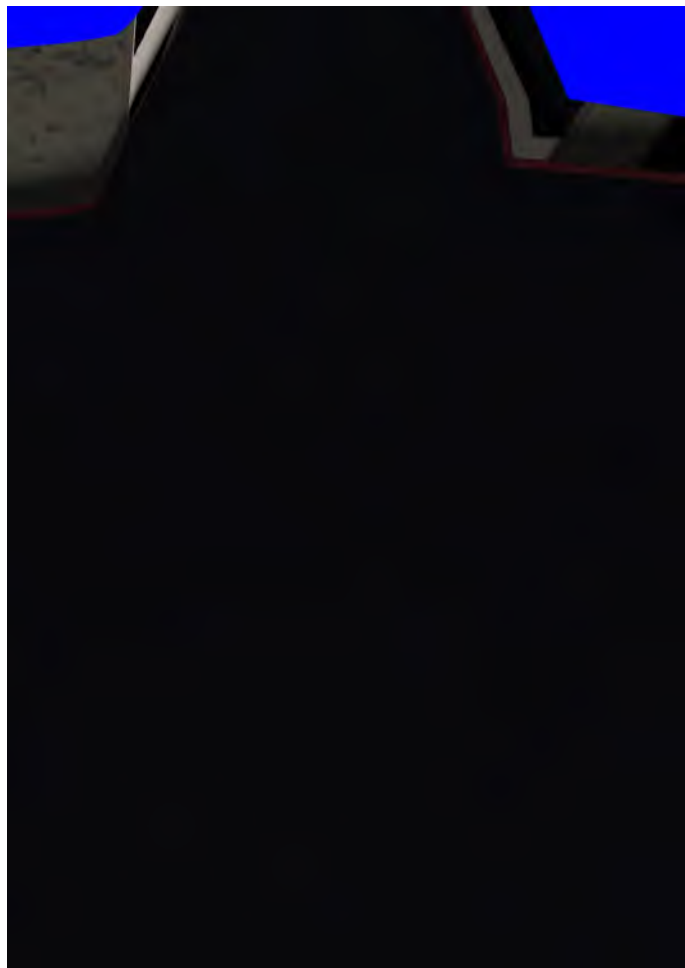
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My Aspirations.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE MATHESON, D.D.,

INNELLAN.

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.

LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.

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HEART CHORDS.

MY ASPIRATIONS.

I.

"And God saw everthing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."—GENESIS i. 31.

IT was all very good at the last, the evenings as well as the mornings. The darkness and the sunshine made the one day, and brought the retrospect of rest. Oh, thou divine Creator! give me the faith in Thine own experience. Help me to believe in the ultimate glory of my evenings. I call Thee good in the morning hours when the sun of life is mounting high and the blaze of hope is dazzling. But I have not yet learned to thank Thee for the evening.

I call it chance, accident, misfortune—everything but goodness. Thou art creating me against my will. My progress is from the evening to the morning. My conscious darkness is the birth-hour of my day. Thou art never nearer to me than in my shadows of evening. It is over the face of my troubled waters that Thy Spirit broods. Thou art bringing life out of my billows. In the storm and in the darkness Thou art speaking and shining. Thou art preparing my Sabbath through the night, my rest through unrest. When Thou hast finished my creation I shall know how glorious have been its evenings, how full of hidden light, how rich in golden suns! From the heights of Thy sabbath rest I shall judge all things. I shall look back upon my past, and, behold, there shall be no night there. I shall say with Thee in Thy sabbath, “It is all very good.”

II.

"There arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want."—LUKE xv. 14.

Poor prodigal, it was out of thine own enlargement the famine arose. The famine arose in the land, and thy destitution caused thee to feel it. True, there was plenty of food for the swine. Is it not written, "He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing?" But thou art not a living thing; thou art a living soul. All the wealth of creation would be swine-husks to thee. All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them would be dross to thee. All the fulness of earthly joy would be want to thee. Thy demand exceeds thy supply, and predicts thy immortality. If this were thy land thou wouldst have no famine in it. Thy want is the beginning of the Divine fulness in thee. It is thy richest possession, for it is thy surest prophecy. It tells thee thou art supernatural and awaitest wider surroundings. Oh, glorious famine! Oh, want, that art

full of revelation ! Oh, poverty, that art my claim to infinite wealth ; when I hear thy message in my soul I shall be able with confidence to respond, " I will arise and go to my Father ! "

III.

" I do set my bow in the cloud. "—GENESIS ix. 13.

Yes, it is in the clouds that Thou hast spanned the gulf between earth and heaven. Nature can span it in our sunshine ere we have learned the dark shade of the soul's sin and sorrow. But when the shadows appear within, it is in vain that the sunshine gleams without. Nature has no bow for the clouds. It is beautiful to the beautiful, it is joyful to the joyous, but it has no bow for the clouds. It has no arch of triumph to glitter through the tears of sorrow, to tell the eye of sorrow that earth is somewhere joined to heaven. But Thou art luminous where nature is dark—in the clouds. Thy revelation is the world's mystery ; Thine appear-

ing is the world's cross. I never see Thee till the cloud has overshadowed from my sight all the proud trophies of myself. My sense of night is Thy day. When I ask to build a tabernacle to Thee, in answer Thou sendest me a cloud. I accept thine answer, Lord. I will not fear to enter into the cloud. Thy bow is in it. Thy promise is in it. The pledge of all possible promises is in it, for I see in the midst of it One like unto the Son of Man, and in companionship with Him I shall have all things.

IV.

"And when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples."—MARK iv. 34.

It is only when I am alone with Thee that I perfectly understand Thee. When Thou speakest to the multitude there are many things I cannot comprehend. Outward life is a parable, and it is often hard to read. I can tell the gain of my own griefs; those of my brother

sometimes baffle me. Why should it not be so? My own soul is before me; the soul of my brother is not before me. In him I see but the parable—the visible form of sorrow; I cannot taste its fruit. Shall I judge of Thy providence without knowing the case? Shall I say Thou art stern, cruel, severe, when the facts are not before me? Nay, I shall go to the one object of my knowledge—my own soul. My soul is within my experience, and I would be alone with it and with Thee. I cannot read the plan of this big world, but I can read the plan of my own life. My sorrows are a mystery to my brother as his are to me, but each of us in his own heart has the mystery made manifest. My heart indicates the dark places of Thy providence. Thou hast revealed the parable in my solitary soul. Out of the darkness I have grown to Thee. Through the night I have come to Thee. Over the waves I have been borne to Thee. From the grave of buried hopes I have been raised to Thee. I will not be afraid though the earth be removed and

the hills be shaken with the swelling seas,
for Thou hast taught me in the lone silence of
my spirit the exposition of the great parable—
the ark in the flood.

V.

"Ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion."—PSALM cxxxiv. 1. & 3.

Strange time for adoration, you say. To stand in God's house by night, to worship in the depth of sorrow—it is indeed an arduous thing. Yes, and therein lies the blessing; it is the test of perfect faith. If I would know the love of my friend I must see what it can do in the winter. So with the Divine love. It is easy for me to worship in the summer sunshine when the melodies of life are in the air and the fruits of life are on the tree. But let the song of the bird cease and the fruit of the tree fall, and will my heart still go on to sing? Will I stand in God's house by night? Will I love

Him in His own night? Will I watch with Him even one hour in His Gethsemane? Will I help to bear His cross up the dolorous way? Will I stand beside Him in His dying moments with Mary and the beloved disciple? Will I be able with Nicodemus to take up the dead Christ? Then is my worship complete and my blessing glorious. My love has come to Him in His humiliation. My faith has found Him in His lowliness. My heart has recognised His majesty through His mean disguise, and I know at last that I desire not the gift but the Giver. When I can stand in His house by night I have accepted Him for Himself alone.

VI.

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."—DEUT.
xxxiii. 25.

My soul, why art thou perplexed about the future? Seest thou clouds in to-morrow's sky which thy present strength is inadequate to meet? God has not given thee thy present

strength to meet the future, but to meet the present. When thy morrow shall become thy day thou shalt learn thy power over it. Why art thou distressed about the unborn sorrow? Thou thyself art born anew for each new day. Thine armour is freshly burnished to fight each rising sun. In the hour of battle thou wilt laugh at the memory of thy fears. Thou wilt say even of the last enemy that shall be conquered—"Oh, death! where is thy sting? Oh, grave! where is thy victory?" Thou shalt marvel at thyself when thou passest through the valley; thou shalt tread it so lightly, so easily. Thou shalt ask, "Can this be death?" Thou shalt wonder to hear its desert break into singing, to see its wilderness blossom like the rose. Thou shalt be surprised to find so many lights gleaming in the valley. But the lights will be not in the valley but in thee. God will illuminate thee for the dark day, and what shadows shall abide the blaze of His illumination? The light will not come till the shades come. Weaken not thy spirit by forebodings

Him in His own night? Will I watch with Him even one hour in His Gethsemane? Will I help to bear His cross up the ^{dolorous way?} Will I stand beside Him in His dying moments? Will I be with Mary and the beloved disciple? Will I be able with Nicodemus to take up the dead Christ? Then is my worship complete and my blessing glorious. My love has come to Him in His humiliation. My faith has found Him in His lowliness. My heart has recognised His majesty through His mean disguise, and I know at last that I desire not the gift but the Giver. When I can stand in His house by night I have accepted Him for Himself.

As the days...

My soul
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which
must?

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come—"Oh, death! where is thy sting? Give! where is thy victory?" Thou shalt not thyself when thou passest through the valley thou shalt tread it so lightly, so easily. Thou shalt ask, "Can this be death?" Thou shalt not hear its desert break into wilderness blossom like the valley. Thou shalt be surprised to find so many flowers in the valley. But the lights of life are only but in thee. God will conquer the dark day, and what shall be the blaze of His illumination? It will not come till the shades of death are driven from thy spirit by forebodings

before battle, for in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the battle-trump shall sound, thy power shall be raised incorruptible, and "as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

VII.

"Then they willingly received him into the ship : and immediately the ship was at the land."—JOHN vi. 21.

There was no more sea. The moment Jesus was received into the ship there was an immediate sight of land. Life was transformed from an island into a continent. The pathway ceased to be a struggle ; it became a level march. The moment I have surrendered my will the storm of life is over—"they willingly received Him." It is my unwillingness to give up the helm that keeps me so far from land. I want a calm power within to balance me amid the waves. I want a sure hand without to hold me steadfast in the billows. I want an abiding presence around to say, even through the voice of the storm, "It is I." The tempest itself must be to

me Thy voice. The sea itself must be to me the heaving of Thy bosom of love. I can have no peace in the storm till I know that Thou art the storm—till I hear the troubled waters saying, "It is I." But then it shall be immediate land—land without sea. The thunder shall become Thy still, small voice. The night shall be the shadow of Thy wings, and the winds the rustling of their passing by. When my will shall be Thy will there shall be no more sea; when I have received Thee into the ship I shall touch the summits of Ararat.

VIII.

"But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—PHIL. iii. 13, 14.

What a bold religion this faith of Christ is! No human ambition has ever touched the height of its aspirations. The faiths of the world have sought their glory in the past; this

forgets the things that are behind. It has no past. It is all future, all desire, all longing ; it presses onward to the mark for a prize. Yet say not this is pride in my soul ; it is the very breath of humility. It is because my soul is humble that it is aspiring. If I were satisfied with my past, *that* would be pride. But when I press on to something in the front I do so because I feel poor. Pride is the opposite of aspiration. Pride cries, "I have much goods laid up for many days ; soul, take thine ease ; eat, drink, and be merry." Aspiration says, "Oh ! that I had the wings of a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest." Pride watches over her conquered treasures. Aspiration traverses sea and land to find a pearl of great price. Pride goes back to the past and wraps herself in a garment of delicious complacency. Aspiration soars away into the far future, and reaches forth to the things that are before.

My God, it is my poverty that aims at Thee. It is my humility that soars to Thee. It is my

me Thy voice. The sea itself must be to me the heaving of Thy bosom of love. I can have no peace in the storm till I know that Thou art the storm—till I hear the troubled waters saying, "It is I." But then it shall be immediate land—land without sea. The thunder shall become Thy still, small voice. The night shall be the shadow of Thy wings, and the winds the rustling of their passing by. When my will shall be Thy will there shall be no more sea; when I have received Thee into the ship I shall touch the summits of Ararat.

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What a bold religion this faith of Christ is! No human ambition has ever touched the height of its aspirations. The faiths of the world have sought their glory in the past; this

origin? Art thou remembering thy double parentage, and, therefore, thy double duty? Thou hast a duty to thy God, for His breath is in thee ; thou hast a duty to the earth, for out of it wast thou taken. Thou must aspire both upwards and downwards : upward, to reach thy God ; downward, to touch the things of the dust. Thou must receive thy beauty from the breath of God, and thou must give thy beauty to the things of the dust. Thou art placed between the two worlds in order that thou mayest re-unite them ; thou art the mediator between the highest and the lowest. Take the things of the Highest, and give them to the lowest. Take the Divine Love into thyself, and shed it downward upon that which is beneath thee. Shed it down upon every flower that blooms, and every tree that grows, and every bird that sings. Shed it down upon the lowliest things that breathe—upon the insect that lives but for an hour ; upon the reptile that creeps in the mire. Shed it down until it shall become that glass wherein thou

shalt behold God's glory even in the dust, and in whose reflected radiance the dust itself shall be transformed into the image of the Divine.

X.

"God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made."—GEN. ii. 2.

God rested when he had made MAN. The Divine Spirit could only find rest in another spirit. He could not rest in matter—in the sun which ruled the day, and the moon which ruled the night. He could not rest in vegetation—in the herb yielding seed and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind. He could not rest in physical life—in the beast of the field, and the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea. God's rest is communion, and He can only commune with that which is like Himself. Therefore, my soul, He waited for thee—waited until all the six days had been accomplished to find a rest in thy being! Thou alone wert the

mirror in which He could behold His image. Thou alone hadst that river of life in which He could see Himself reflected. Thou alone hadst the germ of a love that in the fulness of time might respond to *His* love. No wonder that when He had ended the world of matter he looked for rest in *thee*!

My soul, thou hast disappointed the Divine hope. Thou hast not been God's sabbath of rest. The sun of righteousness has shone on the river of thy life, but its beams have been broken in thy troubled waters. The music of heaven has floated through thee, but thy notes are out of tune. The Divine image has touched the mirror, but thy breath has dimmed it. There has been but one beloved Son in whom the heart of the Father could repose. *He* has finished the work that was given *thee* to do. Behold *thyself* in Him, thine ideal in Him, thy destiny in Him! Behold in Him the Father's picture of *thee*—the image of thee which He had in His heart when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy!

In Him thou mayest regain thy glory ; thy glory is to be the rest of God !

XI.

"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth."—
ROM. viii. 22.

It is because *we* groan that creation groans. Nature is a mirror of my soul. She cannot give to me anything which I have not first given to her. What I see in the universe is my own shadow. I cannot find joy without me if there is not already joy within me. If I bring a restless heart to the mirror of nature, the mirror of nature will show me my own unrest. If I bring a calm soul to the glass of the universe, the glass of the universe will reflect my own calm. Nature is but the counterpart of myself ; it laughs with me when I am joyful, it weeps when I am sad. Therefore does it weep oftener than it laughs. I can seldom meet in its countenance the flush of perfect joy because my own heart is seldom perfectly joyful. It suffers

vicariously for my sin ; it bears to my sight the image of my own unrest.

My soul, wilt thou not return unto thy rest ? If thou wert altogether lovely all things would be beautiful to thee. Is it not written that the expectant creation "waits for the manifestation of the sons of God ?" No wonder ! Creation's beauty will not be visible until thy beauty be perfected. The creation waiteth for thee with an eager expectancy ; waiteth until thy spirit shall be pure enough to clothe her in its own purity ; waiteth until thou shalt be able to dress her in a sinless robe. All things wait for thy glory to make *them* glorious ; the sunlight of the visible heaven longs to play upon an ocean of love. Love hallows every spot, however mean ; love beautifies every scene, however poor ; love magnifies every form, however lowly. The wilderness and the solitary place shall sing back to thee when thy heart shall begin to sing ; the pastures shall all be green, and the waters shall all be quiet when thou art restored, O my soul !

XII.

"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."—

MATT. vi. 10.

It is not without meaning that He who knew what was *in* man taught us to say "Thy Kingdom come" before we say "Thy will be done." He who passed through the struggle of the garden knew well that for a frail human soul it is no easy thing to say, "Thy will be done;" that in order to say it fully our heart must be under the empire of another heart. What is it that my soul desires when it cries, "Thy will be done"? Is it that God may find no barrier to His power?—that would be a useless prayer; God's outward will *must* be done. Is it that I may be brought into a spirit of stolid submission?—that would be a stoic's prayer; not one such as the angels pray in heaven. To do His will as the angels do it is to do it not with resignation, but with acquiescence. To say, "Thy will be done as it is in heaven" is to say: make Thy will my will.

It is to cry for power to say : I would not have my dearest possession if it be not dear to Thee ; I would rather lose my costliest gift if it be not precious in Thy sight ; I would welcome any sorrow if it brought me nearer Thee—that is to pray, “Thy will be done as in heaven.”

My soul, art thou ready for this? Art thou prepared to go down with Him into Gethsemane? Art thou strong enough to take thy Father's cup into thy hand, and drain it as a good and perfect gift from Him? Yes ; but His kingdom must first come to thee. God alone can help thee to *choose* God. His beauty must be *in* thee ere thou canst desire it ; His angels must strengthen thee ere thou canst do the will as *they* do it. To *do* His will is to *will* His will ; it is to throb with His heart, to beat with His pulse, to breathe with His breath, to burn with His love, to see with His eyes. His will shall be done in thee when thou shalt receive an answer to the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come.”

XIII.

"In the daytime He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire."—Ps. lxxviii. 14.

My Father, Thou hast been leading me both by day and by night ; but Thy guidance by day has been different from Thy guidance by night. By day I have had Thy cloud, and by night I have had Thy fire. The cloud is the special need of my day ; the fire is the special need of my night. My day is my prosperity ; it is the time when the sun of fortune is bright above me, and, therefore, it is the time when I need a shade. The light would make me dizzy if it were not for the cloud. If my sunshine were not chequered I would forget Thee, O my God ! Therefore it is that I can say, with one of old, 'The Lord is my shade on my right hand ; the sun will not smite me by day.' But I have nights to meet as well as days. The night is my adversity ; it is the time when the sun of fortune has gone down behind the hills and I am left alone, and then it is, O my Father, that I need

the light of Thy fire ! Thy fire is Thy love which warms because it shines. When my soul has gone down into the shadows it craves the sight of a star, and it finds it in the star of Bethlehem. My light of fire for the night is the vision of Calvary—the vision of Thy love in the Cross. I need the light of Thy fire “*all the night.*” The cloud will suffice for only part of the day ; but the fire will be needed during every hour of darkness. It is natural for the bird to sing in the sunshine ; but it needs a perpetual miracle when “He giveth songs in the night.”

My Father, gird me still with Thy presence, both by day and by night—by day with Thy cloud, by night with Thy light of fire ! By day, teach me to remember my weakness ; and by night, tell me where lies my strength ! By day, point me down into Gethsemane ; and by night, lead me up into the mount of transfigured glory ! By day, show me the burden ; and by night, reveal to me the crown ; so shall my days and nights be girt about with Thee !

XIV.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."--MATT. v. 3.

What a strange object to propose for my aspiration! To be poor in spirit! It seems such an easy, such an unheroic, thing. It is just the most difficult, just the most heroic, thing in the world! It is an easy thing to be spiritually *poor*; but that is not to be poor in spirit. None but the spiritually *rich* can be poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit is to be conscious of my nothingness, and ere I can be that I must have begun to be *something*. Is not my ignorance revealed to me only in proportion as I know? Is not my sinfulness borne home to me only in proportion as I gaze on the Infinite purity? The dead heart cannot know its own deadness. It is in my hour of spiritual convalescence that I first learn my weakness. The nearer I draw to the Master the more do I seem to be following "afar off." My humility has grown with my knowledge. When I was

an infant I tried to catch the sun; when I learned the laws of nature I became poor in spirit. Even so, my God, is my knowledge of Thee. As long as I am apart from Thee I am self-satisfied, because I have no standard by which to measure my low stature. But when I come near to Thee, then for the first time I see *myself*. In Thy light I behold my darkness. In Thy majesty I behold my meanness. In Thy purity I behold my corruption. In Thy wealth I behold my poverty of spirit. My very confession of sin is the fruit of holiness; it is the dawn of light that helps me to see the darkness.

Say not, then, that to be poor in spirit is unheroic. It is already the proof that the kingdom has come: theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. I will not be cast down by my own sense of nothingness. It proves that I have gazed on a higher standard of measurement—the measure of the stature of the perfect man in Christ. O, thou Divine Man, let me gaze on Thee more and more, until, in the vision of Thy brightness,

I loath the sight of my impurity—until, in the blaze of that glory which human eye hath not seen, I fall prostrate, blinded, broken, to rise again a new man in Thee !

XV..

“ Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.”—MATT. v. 4.

The blessedness of sorrow ! That was a strange sound to fall on the ear of those first disciples. They had thought the only blessing of God to be worldly joy—purple and fine linen and sumptuous faring every day. They had believed every man of sorrows to be stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. It must have been to them a startling thing to hear the Master say, “ Blessed are they that mourn.”

The mourning of which He speaks is worldly unrest—the inability to be satisfied with the possessions of life. He tells us that our very unrest is a badge of dignity ; it proves that we are above our surroundings. Why am I in

famine amid the swine-husks? Simply because they *are* swine-husks; they were made for lower creatures than I. If they had been my natural food I never would have known famine; there was no famine amongst the swine. It is because I have a higher home than earth that I cannot be filled by earth. It is because the far country is far from adequate to my nature that I find myself in want within it. The greatest comfort *is* my famine. It is the pledge of my immortality. It tells me this world does not exhaust my powers of being—cannot even come up to their present requirements. It tells me that my desires outrun my capacities, and so predict their coming enlargement. The famine is my primrose; it prophesies the springing of new seeds from the soil of my nature. It cries out to me that there are in this world treasures buried underground waiting some other light to reveal them; my unrest is itself the vision of approaching summer. Oh, Divine dissatisfaction! Oh, dispeace that makes for peace! Oh, unrest that is the harbinger of holy

calm! Oh, fluttering of the wings that comes from a vision of the nest—my hope of blessedness is born of thee!

XVI.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

—MATT. v. 5.

There is a meekness which inherits nothing. There are *two* kinds of calmness in this world—the calmness of the stagnant pool and the calmness of the deep sea. The one is quiet because it has nothing to say; the other because it restrains itself from speaking. And it is this latter that is the glorious thing—*not* the meekness that speaks not because it is empty, *but* the meekness that speaks not because its depths are full. Why is it that I admire the gentleness of Jesus? There are hundreds of voiceless souls in the world that do not strive nor cry. Yet I do not call *them* divine; wherefore has *this* man's gentleness made him great to me? It is because in Him I find the calm that I find

in nature—the calm which does not exist because it *needs* to be, but because it chooses to be. I know that yon fair sky could, if it chose, break into frowns and thunders, and I prize the quiet as the voluntary gift of the day. Even so, I know that beneath the silent surface of this Divinest life there are depths innumerable, voices unspeakable, feelings unfathomable, powers immeasurable. I know instinctively that no man taketh His life from Him; He has power to lay it down, and He has power to take it again. I know that if He would, He could bring His legions of angels to turn Gethsemane into Sinai—to change the calm into a storm, and I reverence the strength that will not do it. O Thou Divine power of meekness, I bow before Thy marvellous strength! I stand amazed in the presence of that might which could empty itself of *all* might. Thou art more wonderful to me in Thy cross than in Thy crown. Thou art greater to me in what Thou hast given up than in what Thou possessest. Thy glory is Thy shame. Thy

Majesty is Thy self-surrender. Thy Kinghood is Thy service. Thy power to rule is Thy power to bear. Thou art the Head over the body of humanity ; just because, without complaining, Thou takest the pains of all its members. Thy gentleness hath made Thee great ; Thy meekness hath inherited the earth.

XVII.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled.”—MATT. v. 6.

What a wonderful breadth of Divine charity ! He who is altogether righteous will accept from us even the *thirst* after righteousness. He will not reserve His blessing until I become actually pure ; He will bless my very effort after purity. He will accept the mere *desire* of Him ; the mere wish of my heart to be like Him ; the mere throb of my pulse to be near Him. Though I have not reached Him, if only I see in Him a beauty that I long for He will count it unto me for righteousness. Though I claim not to be

like Him, and despair ever to touch the hem of his garment, if only I can admire afar off the kingliness of His beauty He will bless my very hunger and my very thirst for Him. Yet, say not, Oh, my soul, that thou hast salvation without goodness. Thou couldst not hunger after Him, thou couldst not thirst for Him, if He were not already *in* thee. Thou couldst not see in Him any beauty to desire if thou thyself hadst not the germ of the same beauty. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is;" thy vision *of* Him is the proof of thy likeness *to* Him. If thou wert not like Him, thou wouldst not see Him as He is. If He were not *in* thee, thou couldst not wish to imitate Him—couldst not even feel thy despair of imitating Him. Thou canst not admire what is out of thy nature, nor seek what is not kindred to thy being. Therefore, my soul, thy hunger pleads for thee, thy thirst intercedes for thee, thy longing advocates for thee, thy very sense of moral want predicts that the spirit is at the door. Thou canst cry for outward food before thou knowest the taste

thereof, but thou canst not cry for righteousness until thou hast "tasted that the Lord is good." He who sees the King in His beauty has himself begun to be beautiful ; he who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is already beginning to be filled.

XVIII.

' How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger !"—
LUKE xv. 17.

Yes ; the hired servants of my Father have in this life more than I. There are wants in my being which are not shared by the objects of nature or by the beasts of the field. The Father openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. The star has its orbit from which it seeks not to swerve ; the bird carols all the day in the blue expanse of heaven ; the sparrow hath found a house and the swallow a nest for herself ; but my soul longeth, fainteth. My soul is of more value than many sparrows, yet it has not in this world found a house for

itself. Whensoever it has proposed to build a tabernacle on some mount of glory there has come a cloud and hid the vision from its sight. Ever as it climbs the mountain it sees a peak which it hopes will be the last, but the moment it has reached it a voice resounds in its ear, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest." If in this life only, we have hope, we are of all creation most miserable. We have not even the earthly fulness of the hired servants. We have not the feet of the roe, nor the eye of the eagle, nor the strength of the lion. We have desires beyond our capacities. Our eye is not satisfied with its seeing ; our ear is not content with its hearing. The hired servants have bread and to spare ; *I* perish with hunger !

Nay, my soul, it is by reason of thy hunger thou perishest *not*. It is thy hunger keeps thee alive as an immortal. The Father satisfieth on earth the desire of every living thing ; but thou art not a thing : thou art a spirit. Matter cannot fill a spirit. If thou *were* one of the hired servants the husks would suffice for thee ; but

thou art not a servant : thou art a son. There floats before thee a vision of the imperial palace whence thou camest, and all the joys of earth are to thee but the shades of the prison-house. Thou shalt be satisfied when thou shalt awake with His likeness.

XIX.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."—ISAIAH xl. 31.

It is a glorious thing to feel the fulness of youth. It is a grand thing to have the sense of morning. It is the joy of having the world all before me—the thought that my opportunities are yet to come. What golden dreams I had when I was young ! What visions I had of what I would do at noon-day ! How the airy castles danced and sparkled in the sun ! But now the noon is passed and the castles have faded. I have not realised the dreams of my boyhood. The imperial palace of my fancy has melted into the light of common day. Was it,

indeed, all a dream? The prophecy was not founded on earthly experience, but for that very reason I hoped that its origin was Divine. Whence did I derive the golden dream? It came to me before I knew the world ; therefore, it seemed to come from other worlds, and I trusted it was supernatural. Yet it is unfulfilled. Morning is faded, noon-tide is passed, the afternoon is far spent, evening is drawing on, but the promised glory has not come.

Be still, my soul, it is coming ! The sense of morning is yet to be revived in thee. Natural youth faints and grows weary, and its ideal is not realised. But natural youth itself was all along but a shadow—but the counterfeit of a spiritual dawn. Morning is coming back to thee, oh, my soul—back to thee with the pulses of a new life, with the boundings of a new hope, with the freshness of a new heart, with the energy of a new will. In God thy past shall be cancelled and thou shalt be free—free to begin again with the unimpeded joyousness of a child at play. In the Cross of thy Lord all other

crosses shall be banished. Thy years of remorse shall no more trouble thee. Thou shalt be a new creature ; it shall be all to-morrow, and no yesterday. The dark deeds shall be undone, the hard words unspoken, the lost chances restored, the golden dreams revived in the life of God. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

XX.

“They shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—ISAIAH xl. 31.

They shall mount with wings ; they shall run ; they shall walk ! Is not this a strange descent in the scale of aspiration ? To begin with the wing, then to subside into the run, and at last to settle down into the sober walk : it seems a process of decline. Nay ; it is the true order of the spiritual life. When the Spirit of Christ first enters into my soul it causes a fluttering of the wings. I am caught up in rapture to meet my

Lord in the air. The world with its allurements fades in a far distance, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers ; my faith as yet is but a flight. By and by I touch the solid earth, but only as the runner touches it, with swift and momentary step. The first flutter of the heart has subsided, but the even pace is not yet come ; my faith is not weary, but it is running. At last the race itself subsides into the walk and that world of common day which the wings of the spirit had scorned becomes again compatible with the religious life ; my faith can now face without fainting the things of common day—I have learned to *walk* with God.

And this, my soul, is the triumph of thy being—to be able to *walk* with God. Flight belongs to the *young* soul ; it is the *romance* of religion. To run without weariness belongs to the *lofty* soul ; it is the *beauty* of religion. But to walk and not faint belongs to the *perfect* soul ; it is the *power* of religion. Canst thou keep thyself unspotted *in* the world ? Canst thou walk in white through the stained thoroughfares of men ?

Canst thou touch the vile and polluted ones of earth and retain thy garments pure? Canst thou meet in contact with the sinful and be thyself undefiled? *Then* thou hast finished thy course with joy—thou hast surpassed the flight of the eagle !

XXI.

“ And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship.”—MATT. xiv. 22.

Jesus *constrained* them to go ! One would think that if ever there was the certain promise of success in a mission it was here. These men are actually constrained to put to sea ! They are driven by an impulse which they cannot understand and which they cannot resist : they have a call from the Lord to do so. Surely, here, if anywhere, a triumphant issue might have been confidently predicted ; and yet here, more than anywhere, there was seeming failure. He sent them out on a voyage, and they met such a storm as they had never yet experienced.

Let me ponder this, for it has been so with me, too. I have sometimes felt myself impelled to act by an influence which seemed above me—constrained to put to sea. The belief that I was constrained gave me confidence, and I was sure of a calm voyage. But the result was outward failure. The calm became a storm; the sea raged, the winds roared, the ship tossed in the midst of the waves, and my enterprise was wrecked ere it could reach the land.

Was, then, my Divine command a delusion? Nay; nor yet was my mission a failure. He did send me on that voyage, but he did not send me for *my* purpose. He had one end and I had another. My end was the outward calm; His was my meeting with the storm. My end was that the earthly haven should be reached in safety; His was that I should not find the earthly haven. My end was to gain the harbour of a material rest; His was to teach me that there is a rest even on the open sea. Was it not worth while to be sent upon the voyage just to get a sight of that vision—the Divine Man

walking on the sea? Was it not worth while to have been storm-tost just to hear the voice, "Be not afraid; it is I"? Do not resist thine impulse, oh, my soul! It may not send thee to what man calls good fortune, but it will bring thee thine own prosperity—the power to find thy God in the very heart of the world's storm.

XXII.

"The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."—JOHN i. 51.

All things climb on Thee, Divine Son of Man! Thou art the ladder of all aspirations. The whole creation aspires to Thee. It is not only the angels that ascend by the steps of Thy life. The world of men grows up *by* Thee and *to* Thee. Thou art always leading our thoughts as Thou didst lead the Magi of old. Thou art always a step in advance of all our civilisations. We have not yet reached the summit of Thee. We have not yet scaled the height of Thy wondrous being. Thou art still ever before

us, guiding the way. Thou art still fairer than the sons of men ; Thou art still purer than the lives of men ; Thou art still holier than the hearts of men. We ascend to heaven by the vision of Thee.

On the steps of Thy human life let my soul climb to God. Let me ascend from earth to heaven on the ladder of Thy human growth. Let me become a child with Thy child-life, a young man with Thy youth, a full-grown man with Thy maturity. Let me rise step by step with Thee—from Thy Bethlehem to Thy Nazareth, from Thy Nazareth to Thy temptation, from Thy temptation to Thy Calvary, from Thy Calvary to Thine Olivet. Let me fill, one by one, the spheres of Thy earthly being, from the life of the home circle to the life in humanity. Let me make my choice with Thee on the mount of vision, between Thy Kingdom and the kingdoms of this world's glory. Let me maintain my choice with Thee against prosperity and adversity alike. Let me maintain it against the splendours of the transfiguration and against

the horrors of the garden. Let me climb at last into the inheritance of Thy calm joy—into that peace which a cross itself cannot ruffle. When I have ascended into that heaven I shall be able to *descend*. When I have become an angel in height I shall be fitted to be an angel in ministration. When I have mounted into Thy joy I shall have power to help the dwellers in the valley.

XXIII.

“ Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles.”—MARK ix. 5.

Peter had reached the most sublime moment his life had yet known. He had left the world behind him in a flight of ecstasy. He had gone up to the summit of a mount of high vision. He had lost himself and his surroundings in the sense of a glory which the world could not see, and the murmur of the lives of men faded far away. He was for the moment the antagonist of all temporal things. He wanted to be done with them for ever, to stand above them on a

pinnacle of rapture, to set up his permanent tabernacle upon the mountain's brow.

I, too, have had this desire. I, too, have had high hours of spiritual communion which I have longed to make eternal. When I have taken the sacred bread into my hand in memory of the Master's dying hour, or when I have knelt at evening prayer within the courts of the sanctuary, I have often wished that the tabernacle were here. I have lamented that I could have no permanent rest in that hallowed scene—that so soon I must hear once more the wheels of busy life and tread again the paths of common day. I have cried, Why must I go back? Why must I return to the dust and the din of the battle? Why not let me linger for ever in this calm, ineffable joy? My God, let me make for Thee my tabernacle here !

And the answer to me and to Peter is the same—Arise and depart, for this is not your rest. You were not made for the mountain, but for the valley. The place that is good for *you* is not the sphere of exaltation, but the

sphere of ministration. See, at the foot of this mountain there is a demoniac waiting to be healed. He cries to you from the valley of humiliation! Shall you fear to enter into his cloud of suffering? Is it too prosaic a thing to be a healer of common pain? The cloud that hides the vision is itself thy glory. The storm that breaks thy mountain tabernacle is itself thy rest; it calls thee down into the valley to minister with the angels of God. Thou canst build thy tabernacle *there!*

XXIV.

"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."—GEN. xxviii. 16, 17.

There is a sense in which the hours of our life only become present to us when they are past. We never quite know the meaning of an event until it is gone. It is only from the completed morning of creation we can see that it has been all very good. Jacob had been

passing through a season of great suffering. He was a fugitive from his home ; he was an exile from his country ; he was houseless, friendless, wayworn, weary. It was the sunset of his fortunes, and he had only a stone for his pillow. He felt as if God had deserted him—as if the wings of the Divine life had passed by and left him in the wilderness alone. He said, in his soul, my way is hid from the Lord, and he slept for very sorrow. He woke ; and what did he find ? Why, that he had been altogether mistaking his position. He found that, in point of fact, he had never in his life been so near to God as he was in that moment when he thought God furthest away. In that hour in which he said he was alone, the chariots of the Divine glory had been rolling round him, and the angels of the Divine presence had been hovering by his side. He saw that unconsciously he had been the recipient of a great blessing, and he longed for the return of the hour which he had loathed. Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not.

My soul, this is also thine experience. How often hast thou said, in thy sorrow: verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself! How often hast thou slept for very heaviness of heart, and desired not to wake again! And when thou didst wake again, lo, the darkness was all a dream! Thy vision of yesterday was a delusion. God had been with thee all the night with that radiance which has no need of the sun. Thy pathway of tears was the royal rainbow spread for thine upward march. Oh, my soul, it is not only after the future thou must aspire; thou must aspire to see the glory of thy past. Thou must learn to see that thy yesterday was all very good. Thou must find the glory of that way by which thy God has led thee, and be able even of thy sorrow to say, This was the gate of heaven!

XXV.

"Behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."—EXODUS iii. 2.

The only thing which is not consumed by burning is my soul. Fire is the death of my body, but fire is the life of my soul. When my goods are burned they perish, but when my soul takes fire it for the first time begins to live. It is the *want* of fire that consumes my soul. It is because I have so little enthusiasm that I have so little life. The worm of worldly care gnaws at my heart just because there is no fire in my heart to destroy it. My force is wasted by its expenditure on myself. I want something to lift me out of myself in order that I may be strong. Nothing can lift me out of myself but fire, the fire of the heart—love. If I could only be kindled into love, the last enemy would be conquered—death. Love would consume all my cares, but it would give new strength to *me*. There might be a wilderness around me, but my bush would

be glorious—luminous. It would be seen afar off by all the travellers in the desert. It would be a light to lighten the ages, untouched by passing clouds, undimmed by flying years. My heart would never be consumed if only it could *burn*.

In Thee, O Lord, let my heart be kindled ! Thy love alone can wake my love. Thy fire alone can impart fire to *me*. Thy light alone can illuminate and warm me with that ardour which consumes not. Thou Divine Love of Bethlehem, of Gethsemane, of Calvary, descend into my heart and kindle it ! Fan it into Thine own sacred flame. Wake it into the fervour of burning zeal. Stir it into the glow of warm aspiration. Stimulate it into the blaze of an high enthusiasm which shall people the very wilderness with interests innumerable. Then shall my heart be ever young. Every hour shall be morning, every season shall be spring, every year shall be the year of jubilee. They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall bring forth fruit even in old age. Their eye

shall not be dim, nor their natural strength abated, for the fire that burns within them is a fire that does not consume.

XXVI.

"The God of Israel will be your reward."—ISAIAH
lii. 12.

Why should I be anxious about the rear of life—the days I have left behind? Is it not enough for me that I have a God in the *van*? Have I not done with the past for ever? Have I not now to do entirely with the future? I can see the comfort of knowing that my God goes before me. I can feel the joy of believing that all my coming days are already in the *life* of my God. But how can it advantage me to know that my past is in his hands? I need Him for to-morrow, but surely not for yesterday. I need Him in looking forward, but surely not in looking back. I need Him for what I am to be, but surely not for that which I have been. What aspiration can it satisfy

to tell me, the God of Israel shall be thy rearward?

Thy highest aspiration, oh, my soul—the aspiration without which all thine other aspirings are cold, and dead, and impossible. The greatest danger is from thy past—from the *rear* of thy life. Thou hast been marching on, leaving unconquered fortresses in thy rear. Thou hast not overcome the past enemies of thy life. Old habits are lying in ambush unsubdued. They will meet thee again, my soul, in an hour that thou knowest not. Thy yesterday is not dead; it is waiting for thee in the secret chamber. It will come up to confront thee in thine hour of weakness, and will force thee to stay thy march. Is there no power that will go back to take up the crosses I have left by the wayside? Is there no hand that will stretch into the past to do for me what I have left undone? Yes; and that is my comfort. My God, thou art my rearward. Thou art crucifying my past every day. Thou art redeeming me from the errors of yesterday.

Thou art lifting up those crosses I have left by the wayside ; Thy work is undoing hour by hour the mischief wrought by mine. O Thou redeemer of my past, Thou hast set me free to begin anew without the damping sense of spot or stain ! I have entered Thy kingdom as a little child again ; my past is all gathered up when Thou art my rearward.

XXVII.

" And Peter followed afar off."—LUKE xxii. 54.

What a contrast to the Peter of earlier days ! Can this be he who in the ardour of impetuous youth plunged into the sea of trouble to meet his Lord ? Where is the first aspiration gone ? It has certainly faded ; and yet I am not sure that there is not progress of life in the very fading. The man who once sought his Lord on the sea now follows Him afar off on land, but that is because he now knows Him better. Peter walking on the *sea* of life is less eulogistic to Christianity than Peter following on the land.

He did not in his first ardour see the real distance between himself and his Lord. He was not humble enough. He had not measured with his eye the breadth of that gulf which stretched betwixt him and his Master. His was the enthusiasm of the young poet who thinks he can reach by a bound the goal of his admiration. But when Peter did see the chasm he fainted. When he found how hard a thing it was to be a Christian he fell back. He knew his Lord better now, and therefore he knew better his own nothingness. He was not fit to meet the Son of Man on the same road ; he was not fit to follow Him at a close distance. It was because he was really more near to the vision that he was more humble, more fearful, more crouching. He had *seen* the cross, therefore he followed afar off.

My soul, it will be so with thee. The nearer thou art to the goal the further to thyself wilt thou seem from it. Thou wilt appear to be afar off from the object of thy love just in proportion as thou nearest Him. The light will be to thee

more inaccessible the closer thou drawest to its glory. The purity will to thee be more inapproachable the nearer thou art to its likeness. The heaven will to thee be more unattainable the higher thou art in thine ascent. Be not dismayed by the increase of thy sense of distance. It is the growth of thy knowledge that makes the growth of thy dissatisfaction. It is the vision of the cross that makes thee follow afar off.

XXVIII.

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the
Lord."—HOSEA vi. 3.

"To know the Lord!" That is a bold aim for my finite soul. And yet, my soul will be satisfied with nothing less. I am beating day and night against the bars of the prison-house. I am struggling with the mystery that environs my being. I am crying for the Light that alone can explain the darkness. I would be content even to touch the hem of His garment as He

passes by. I feel that to know Him would indeed be life eternal.

But, my soul, it is not by searching thou canst find out thy God ; it is by *following* Him. This knowledge which thou seekest is not the beginning of thy life, but the end of it. It is not the spring, but the summer of thy Christian experience. It comes not with the bud, but with the full-blown flower. It is not the germ of thy being ; it is the fruit of thy spiritual beatitude. Do I say that if I had a vision of God I would be good ? The Divine word answers me—be thou first good, and thou shalt have a vision of God. It is by *following* Him that thou shalt learn to know Him. Practice is the alphabet of Divine knowledge. Wouldst thou know the doctrine ? Then, thou must do the will. Wouldst thou see God ? Then, thou must be pure in heart. Wouldst thou look upon Him as He is ? Then, thou must first be like Him. God is Love. He has other *attributes*, but that is His essence—that is Himself. Love alone can behold love. Canst thou hear music

with the eye ; canst thou see colours with the ear? Nay ; nor by any organ save the heart canst thou look on love. The heart is the sense that sees God, and the heart is the life of love. If thou wilt walk with Him, thou shalt learn to know Him. Thou shalt reach Him by the shortest of all avenues—sympathy. Thy vision may be long in coming ; but when it comes it will be in a flash, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. When thou hast followed Him to the gates of Gethsemane, thou shalt know as thou art known.

XXIX.

“ Look unto me, and be ye saved.”—ISAIAH xlv. 22.

A Divine mesmerism ! “ Look unto me.” “ There is life for a *look* at the Crucified One.” I am to gaze on Him until I catch the impress of His image. I am to gaze on Him until His will passes into mine. I am to gaze on Him until my nature shall become so weak before Him that He shall do with me what He

pleases, shall turn me to all His purposes, shall fill me with all His thoughts. It is all easy after the *look*. Let me but once gaze on Him and I shall have no power over myself any more. The Divine life shall pass through me as a rushing mighty wind. I shall be a new creature. I shall speak with other tongues. I shall throb with another heart. I shall see with another eye. I shall desire with another will. Thy will shall be my will, O my God, when I have been transfixed by the mesmeric gaze of faith. Thy brightness shall become my brightness when I behold on the Mount of Vision Thy countenance shining as the day ; I shall be transfigured into the same image from glory to glory. Thou shalt to me fill all things as the object of love fills all the life that loves. Thine image shall eclipse the sun and moon ; it shall put out the stars ; it shall extinguish my very self. They tell me that the mesmeric gaze can cure pain ; it will be so with my gaze on Thee. Let but mine eye be rivetted on Thee, and the wounds of the serpent will be all forgotten. There will

be no more pain, because there will be no more self. I will have thenceforth no life but Thine. O Thou Divine Love, whom no natural man can behold and live, let my natural heart behold Thee and die ! Let it fall to the earth like Saul before the excelling glory, and in its room let there rise the new man that only lives in Thee.

XXX.

“ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”—ISAIAH liii. 11.

God had never yet seen the travail of the *soul*. He had received offerings of the *body*. Sacrificial fires had been blazing for ages, from which had gone up the tortures of involuntary victims ; but there had been no surrender of the human will—no travail of the *soul*. The heart of the Infinite Father was not satisfied till there came One who said, I *delight* to do Thy will. But HE came, and all other sacrifices departed. He came to give nothing but Himself—His soul. He poured out His soul from Bethlehem’s

manger even unto death. From dawn to noon-day He climbed the steep of Calvary. He gave up one by one the stages of His being. He gave His childhood in subjection, His youth in toil, His manhood in the treading of the dolorous way ; it was the travail of the *soul* !

My soul, it is thee the Father craves. It is not thy gifts, it is not thy possessions, it is not thy pains and tortures—it is *THYSELF*. He wants from thee nothing but thy *will* to give. Has He commanded thee to offer Isaac, thy best beloved ; well, but it is *thee*, and not Isaac, He is all the time desiring. Wouldst thou prove it ? Come and try. Arise up early in the morning, and get thee to the Mount Moriah of sacrifice, bearing in thine arms thy best beloved ; then, in the moment of thy conquered will, there will come from out the heavens a still, small voice : Lay not thine hand upon thy treasure, neither do it any hurt, for now I know. Yes ; give Him but thy will, and He will take nothing more. He will give thee back all thy gifts with interest—the interest of an unselfish

joy. Isaac shall be restored to thee when thou hast reached the summit of the sacrificial Mount. Earth shall be poured back into thy bosom when thou hast sought the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. Sacrifice shall be asked no more of thee when thou hast surrendered the broken spirit, for the spirit broken by love is the travail of the soul.

XXXI.

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

—JOHN xvii. 4.

I have finished the work. Was not the triumph a little premature? Was the work of the Master indeed done? Was not its heaviest task yet to come? He had not yet met the dread hour of death. He was still only in the shadows of the garden; why did He say—why did He think—that His work was done? It was because He knew that, when the will is given, the battle is ended. He was only in the shadows of the garden; but to conquer *these*

shadows was already to conquer all. He who has *willed* to die has already triumphed over death. All that remains to Him is but the outer husk, the shell. The cup which our Father giveth us to drink is a cup for the *will*; it is easy for the lips to drain it when once the heart has accepted it. He who has given his will can truly say: It is finished!

My soul, art thou lamenting some inability to complete an outward work? Has there come to thee some great impeding calamity? Has sickness paralysed thine arm; has decrepitude laid thee aside from the busy world? Or, dost thou feel that death itself must overtake thee ere thy work be done? Be still; in the sight of the Father of spirits thy work *is* done when thou hast willed to do it. If thou hast the end in thy heart, then thou hast fulfilled thy destiny. Not on the heights of Calvary, but in the shadows of Gethsemane is the cup presented; the act is easy after the choice. The real battlefield is in the silence of the spirit; conquer *there* and thou *art* crowned.

Thy sacrifice is already made when thou hast given up thy heart ; thou hast finished the work which thy Father gave thee to do !

XXXII.

" Oh, satisfy us early with thy mercy."—PSALM xc. 14.

What a bold desire ! It is not only the cry to be satisfied, but to be satisfied early—to be satisfied in that time of youth when it is least easy to content the soul. My aims are never so boundless as in the early days. There is no barrier to the aspirations of my youth ; they are simply limitless. I dream in the meadows of impossible earthly glories. I build palaces of gold in the halls of fancy. I reign as a king on a throne that is to be. I long for sights that were never seen, and for sounds that were never heard, and for love that was never given. My early dreams are most exacting dreams ; there is no boundary to what they claim. And it is *these* I ask God to satisfy—these first, and

highest, and deepest, and most exhaustless yearnings! Surely man's temerity is culminated when he cries, "Satisfy me early with Thy mercy!"

And yet, why should not my soul be satisfied? All other things are satisfied. Bird and beast and flower are filled to the fulness of their being: He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Why should I be an exception? I have the same right as they—that is to say, I have no right. Why are the bird, and the beast, and the flower filled up to the measure of their being? Not from any virtue in themselves; it is all God's mercy—the open hand of love. Why should I expect less than they? We have a common humility, a common nothingness, a common absence of all *right* to joy; yet they are full, and shalt thou, my soul, alone be empty? Shalt thou alone have the power to sing, and not the song; the eye, and not the light; the heart, and not the love! Shalt thou alone have a hunger without food, a thirst without water, an unrest without

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And yet, why should not my soul be satisfied? All other things are satisfied. Bird and beast and flower are filled to the fulness of their being: *He* openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Why should I be any less? I have the same right as the bird, the beast, and the flower filled with the measure of their being? Not from the bounty of *His* mercy; it is all God's mercy.

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this first gush of love, then thou must redeem thy past ; another youth must restore the spontaneous remembrance ; thou must be born a child again !

XXXV.

"They shall bring forth fruit in old age."—PSALM
xcii. 14.

The fruits of the spiritual life last all the year. Each season has its own appropriate produce. Childhood has its trust, and youth has its hope, and manhood has its work, and old age has its mellow love. They tell me that in old age the night cometh when no man can work ; it is true, but there is no cause for sorrow in it. Every season should have its own fruit, and work is not the fruit of old age. Would you call the summer a time of gloom because it cannot give you the primrose ? Nay ; for its fruit is not the primrose, but the rose full-blown. Shall you call old age a time of gloom because it cannot give you work ? Nay ; for its fruit is not work, but mellowness. The fruits of age belong to

itself alone ; no other season can bear them. I hear men speak of the decline of life as a time when the powers decay. Well, there are powers that decay, but there are powers that are then only born. There are voices in the soul which only wake into music when the world's voices are silent ; there are songs which can only be sung in the night. I have no pure retrospect of love until I have breathed the autumn air, have seen the ingathering of what life has done for me. Prophecies and tongues may fail before the portals of old age, but love will there only reach its perfect glow. Is it not written of the aged Jacob that he "worshipped leaning on the point of his staff;" the sacred fire was strong just where the outer candle was burning low.

Even so, my soul, shall it be with thee. Thy flesh may faint and fail, but thy God is the strength of thy heart. There shall be light at thy evening-time—light which even the morning could not give. Thy youth may faint and grow weary, and thy human strength may utterly

fail, but thy faith shall mount up with wings as eagles, and thine inward man shall be renewed day by day. Thy tree of life shall be green when the world's leaves are falling ; thou shalt bring forth fruit in old age.

XXXVI.

" While I was musing the fire burned."—Ps. xxxix. 3.

My soul, if thou wouldst muse more, the fire would burn more. It is because thou hast so little meditation that thou hast so little enthusiasm. Why dost thou not retire oftener within thyself? Thou wouldst be better fitted for the world if thou wert less worldly. Thou art too cold to be great even as men count greatness. If thou hadst more heavenly fire thou wouldst have more earthly power. Is there no secret pavilion into which thou canst go to warm thyself? Is there no Holy of Holies where thou canst catch a glow of impulse that will make thee strong? Remember, all things that have stirred the world have come from

within! Is it not written of the Son of Man that "as He *prayed* the fashion of His countenance was altered?" Yes; it was from His prayer that His transfigured glory came. It was from the glow of His heart that there issued the glow of His countenance; it was when He was musing that the fire burned!

O, my soul, wouldst thou have thy life glorified, beautified, transfigured to the eyes of men? Get thee up into the high mountain. Get thee up into the secret place of God's pavilion where the fires of love are burning. Get thee up into the heights of contemplation which catch the fresh breezes of heaven, and are fanned by the breezes into flame. Thy life shall shine gloriously to the dwellers on the plain—all the more gloriously because thou thyself shalt be unconscious of its shining. Thy prayers shall be luminous; they will light thy face like the face of Moses when he wist not that it shone. Thy words shall be burning; they will kindle many a heart journeying on the road to Emmaus. Thy path shall be lambent; when

thou hast prayed in Elijah's solitude thou shalt have Elijah's chariot of fire.

XXXVII.

"She that tarried at home divided the spoil."—Ps.
lxviii. 12.

There are some in this world who are compelled to tarry at home. The great race of life goes on, and they are left behind ; they are too weak to run. Here is a poor invalid who has for years been unable to leave the bed of pain. He started with grand promise, and men said he would be first at the goal. But God weakened his strength in the way, and he fell ere the race had well begun. He sees the inferiors of other days pass him, and he is tempted to cry, in his despair, What profit is there in my life? Why am I suffered to live on?

Thinkest thou, then, that thou art doing no work for God? God Himself thinks otherwise. He says that they who run in the race have only half the battle ; they must divide the spoil

with those who tarry at home. There are those whose duty it is to *wait* for God ; for this cause were they born, and for this end came they into the world. They have nothing to do with the hand, with the sweat of the brow, with the toil of the brain ; their work is all with the heart.

But what a work *that* is ! The toils of hand and brain are nothing to it ; these yield a solace by their very energy, but the sad heart has only to *bear*. It is harder to bear than to do. I may be rudely jostled in the race, but the race itself gives an excitement that makes me forget my pain ; I am there, at least, in the company of my fellow-men. But to tarry at home, to wait passive under the *shadow* of God, to have nothing to do but bear the burden of one great cross : this is the trial of life—this is the trial of love.

Yes, my soul, and this is thy communion with thy Lord. His work, too, was to tarry at home. All the runners in the race laid their burdens upon HIM, and left Him alone to bear them. He bowed His head in the garden, but He

fainted not. He emptied His glory on the cross, but His love remained full. Stand beside Him, oh, my soul ; watch with Him in the lonely garden ; help Him to bear His cross up the dolorous way ; strive with the dying penitent by His side to see the majestic strength of His sustained weakness : and thou shalt know why it is written of Him, " He shall divide the spoil with the strong."

XXXVIII.

" Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—MAT. xi. 28.

In these words our Lord utters a call to universal humanity, for all men are either labouring or laden. There are some who have to suffer through toil ; there are others who have to weep through the burden that incapacitates from toil ; but, actively or passively, we must all suffer. Our Lord speaks to us through that which makes us one—our cross. What does He promise ? Does He say, " Come unto me

ye workers, and ye shall work no more ; come unto me ye burden-bearers, and ye shall have burdens no more?" Nay ; but He says, "I will give you REST." Come unto me, ye that toil upon the world's highway, and I will give you strength to toil more abundantly. Come unto me, ye that carry the load of some heavy cross, and I will give you power to carry it more lightly. Come ye labouring, and get the ability to labour ; come ye heavy-laden, and get the power to endure.

The rest He offered was from *within* : "Ye shall find rest unto your *souls*." If we could only get rest in our souls we would have rest everywhere. I am crying out with a thorn in the flesh, and praying nightly that it may be removed. Has it never struck me that something else may be sufficient for me—the inward rest of the *soul*? What if, even while the thorn remains, I can be made to forget its presence ! What if I become oblivious of the pain in the absorption of a great thought ! What if the weight that makes me heavy-laden should be

counterbalanced on the other side by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory !

My soul, that is Christ's promise to thee. It is from within thyself that thy rest must come. *Things* cannot give it to thee ; the loss of things cannot take it from thee. If only thou wilt seek the bosom of the Infinite Love, thou shalt be independent of the green pastures and the quiet waters—say, rather, the pastures shall all be green and the waters shall all be still. Thy thorn shall be thy flower, thy burden shall be thy wing, thy cross shall be thy crown of glory, when thou shalt find rest to thy *soul*.

XXXIX.

“ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.”—MATT.
xi. 29.

A strange command, truly ! Our Lord calls to Him the labouring and the heavy-laden that He may give them a new, an added burden. Yes ; but it is a burden that will make the bearer strong. He tells the man who is weighed

down by his own cares to take up the cares of others. He tells him that if he takes up the cares of others his own burden shall fall from him, and he shall be free. He tells him that He Himself in His own experience has tested the cure : "Take *my* yoke upon you, and learn of *me*." Christ's yoke was the love of humanity : that was His care, and that, at the same time, was His freedom from care. He had so much solicitude for man that His personal cross was forgotten. He could speak of His peace, He could speak of His joy under the very shadow of His cross. That was because He had so many burdens of others. He had yielded Himself to the cross of humanity ; therefore His own cross fell in the sea. He had felt the burden of love ; therefore He was oblivious of the burden of life. He had bowed to the yoke of universal sorrow ; therefore he could say, *My* yoke is easy.

My soul, hast thou pondered the meaning of that royal law : Bear ye one another's burdens, for every one shall bear his own burden ? Thou

hast a burden of thine own to bear ; there is no possibility of escaping it. But there is a possibility of lightening it—of making its yoke easy. Take on an additional burden—the burden of others. Lift up the crosses of humanity, and thine own will fall. Carry in thy breast the cares of thy brother, and thine individual cares shall be forgotten. Bow thy head to the yoke of human love, and thou shalt raise thy head from out the yoke of personal fear. Enter into communion with HIS cross of universal sympathy, and thou shalt say with Him of thy cross of special care “ My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

XL.

“ That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them.”—JOHN xvii. 26.

What a golden wish is this of our Lord for humanity ! Have we ever considered the height of perfection which He here desires for us ? If He had merely expressed a wish that His Father would love us as He had loved HIM :

that itself would have been a tremendous hope for humanity; yet that is nothing to what Christ really asks for man. He does not merely ask that the Father would love us with His utmost power of love, but that the Father would put in us His utmost power of *loving*, would make us love even as He Himself loves.

My soul, hast thou considered what great expectations the Master has formed of thee? He wants thee to become recipient of the very love of God. Not simply to be loved *by* God, but to have within thee God's love itself. He asks for thee that thou mayest be able to love thy brother with that degree of love wherewith the Father loves Him. Is not this the very summit of aspiration? I grow dizzy with the height of the promise. To love with God's love; to love with God's love in its moment of utmost intensity; to love with the love wherewith He beholds that Son who is the brightness of His own glory: greater height than this can no man aspire to gain! I am told to aim at the Infinite in that which is the centre of His infinitude—

HIS LOVE! I am bidden to feel with His heart ; to vibrate with His pulse ; to glow with His warmth ! I am asked to be content with nothing less than the fulness of Him that filleth all in all, to be satisfied only when I awake in His likeness. Oh, my soul, if thou hast a right to claim such things, what shall a man give in exchange for thee ?

XLI.

“The well is deep.”—JOHN iv. 11.

There are two sources from which I may derive my aspirations : I may draw them from above, or I may draw them from below. The woman of Samaria had been trying to get streams of nourishment from beneath. Her source of inspiration was a *well*; she drew her motives from an earthly soil, and she found it laborious : “the well is deep,” she says. Yes, truly, thou mistaken soul, it is the depth of inferiority. Thy well goes down too far below thee to be of any service to thee. Its waters

have the taste of earth about them ; they cannot exhilarate thee, they do not make thee strong. They would exhilarate the beast of the field ; they were made for him. The earth-born can be filled by an earthly inspiration. There is no evil in the *well* : God made the fountains from below as well as the fountains from above. But He did not make the fountains from below for *thee*. They are too deep for thee ; they come from too far beneath thee. Thinkest thou that thou canst be inspired by the answer to such questions as these :— What shall we eat ? What shall we drink ? Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? Hast thou ever yet seen the poet who was made a poet by the desire for gain ? Hast thou ever beheld the genius that was awakened by the struggle for bread ? The spirit needs its own draught, and it must come from the world of spirit ; it must descend from above. Thy life needs a living water, for life can only be filled *by* life. The inspiration of thy heart must flow from the streams of that river which makes glad the city

of God. Thou art nearer to the fountain on high than to the depth of the earthly well ; the brute creation is beneath thee, but the Infinite God is at the door of thy being. Thou art more allied to the heights than to the depths ; He shall make thee to drink of the river of His own pleasures.

XLII.

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."—JOHN iii. 3.

Nicodemus thought that he was showing his appreciation of the Master :—"We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles thou doest except God be with him." It was in truth but a child's appreciation. If you were to go to the poet and say : I know you are a man of genius, for no man would have such a reputation for great works unless the spirit of genius were in him ; what would he answer you ? Would he not say : Have you yourself the spirit of genius ? What can my reputation have to do with the matter ?

You can have only one evidence of my greatness—your own perception of my spirit of genius, but to get that *you* must have the spirit too. Genius alone can recognise genius ; to discern a poet you must have been *born* a poet.

That is in principle what our Lord said to Nicodemus:—You come to me because men call me beautiful ; that is a poor argument for your approach. Can you not *see* me to be beautiful? Would you call the sunshine fair because others have called it so? Would not the witness of your own sight outweigh all testimonies? Even so, if you would *love* the kingdom of God you must *see* the kingdom of God. It is not reached by reason however keen, it is not proved by testimony however ample ; it needs a sense of its own—a new sense. You cannot tell colour without the eye, nor music without the ear, nor softness without the touch ; neither without the spirit can you say of God—“We know that Thou art.” Except the new sense be born in you you cannot *see* the king in His beauty.

My soul, art thou asking a sign that thou art born again? Let it be thy sight of His beauty. I ask not if thou hast fathomed His person. I ask not if thou hast named His attributes. I ask not if thou hast explained His work. But, hast thou seen His beauty? Has there risen in thy heart one thrill of admiration however small, one desire however faint, to be like Him? Then thou art like Him, for thou hast seen Him. Thou couldst not have beheld His beauty were it not for a kindred loveliness. Thy Divine vision proves thy Divine creation; thou *hast* been born again.

XLIII.

"Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."—JOHN xx. 29.

Is it then better to believe on slight than on strong evidence? Is faith valuable in proportion as its grounds are small? Is it a more blessed thing for my soul to hope against hope

than to hope with full sight of the goal? Nay; the Son of Man never said that it was. Why did He tell Thomas that he was not yet perfectly blessed? Not because he asked too much evidence, but because he was content with too little. Thomas wanted to test his Lord's reality by an act of outward touch. His Lord expressed Himself surprised: Thomas, thou art too easily satisfied; thou art too humble in thy prayers. Thou hast asked to have contact with my bodily form; what a modest, what an insignificant desire! By all means let it be granted, but do not think that the granting of it will complete thy blessedness. To make thee blessed thou needest not bodily but spiritual contact. Why didst thou not ask that I would come into thy very soul and dwell there? Why didst thou not ask the evidence too deep for sight—the mark of my wounds in thy spirit, the life of my sacrifice within thee? Thou hast aimed too low in thy search for certainty; thou shouldst have sought it in the invisible things of the spirit. Because

thou hast seen thou hast believed ; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

My soul, do not pray for too little. Do not imagine that mere things will make thee blessed. No outward contact with any visible beauty would satisfy thee for an hour. The unseen alone will content thee. The things that belong unto thy peace are not worlds of space. They perish, but thou remainest ; they all wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shall they be folded up, but thou art the same. Ask that which is invisible, eternal, commensurate with thyself—love, sacrificial love, love even for the loveless. Ask the pain of beholding pain the joy of seeing joy, the hope of bringing hope. *That* is to touch the print of the nails, for that is to bear in the spirit the marks of the Lord Jesus.

XLIV.

"The rod of Aaron brought forth buds."—NUMBERS
xvii. 8.

The only rod that budded was the rod of Aaron—the empire of the priesthood, the power of sacrifice. My soul, hast thou pondered this mighty fact? Thou hast been dreaming of the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. Thou hast been gazing on the rod of kinghood as the symbol of heroism. Hast thou ever considered that the one rod which budded amongst the twelve was not that of kinghood, but that of priesthood, of sacrificial love? The rod of kings can *subdue* life, but the rod of Aaron can *create* life. That which can bring forth buds is more than a ruler; it is a creator; it inspires with new vitality. Hast thou tried the power of sacrifice to bring into this world new buds, new fruits, new flowers? There are germs of life down in the valley which cannot bloom into being because no sunshine has reached them; they are dwelling in the shadow

and they wait for the light and warmth. If they could only get the light and the warmth they would burst forth into flower ; the desert would break forth into singing ; the wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. Thou hast the light and warmth ; wilt thou impart them ? Wilt thou go down into the dark valley where the buds cannot spring for want of sun ? Wilt thou bear to the neglected spots of earth the radiance of the day ? The rod of violence can crush the germs of life because they have no beauty in them, but the rod of sacrifice can bring them into bloom. It can wake them into buds of promise, it can touch them with the touch of human sympathy, it can ennoble them by the sense of a contact between man and man. My soul, if thy brother have erred from the way, do not speak to him from the top of thy mountain ; go down to meet him in his own valley. Go down to tell him that thou art one with him, that his fall has not made thee his superior. Go down to restore, but restore in the spirit of meekness ; not from the height of

elevation, but from the level of common and conscious weakness. Then shall the buds break forth in thy sunshine, and the blossoms be unfolded in thy light, for thy rod shall be the rod of Aaron and thy empire the throne of the Lamb.

XLV.

"And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land."—JOSH. v. 12.

There were to be no more miracles. The food which had come down from heaven in their childhood was, now that they had reached manhood, to come up from the ground. The Presence which had guided them in their helplessness was now to guide them into the power to guide themselves. Up to this time each man had been fed by God ; from this time each man was to feed his brother. The manna was no longer to fall spontaneously from the skies. The parent was to toil for the child, the husband was to labour for the wife, the strong

were to work for the weak. The life which had been nourished by wonder was to be supported by the duties of the common day, and in the room of the mysterious manna the world was to gather the old corn of the land.

My soul, art thou weeping over this change? Wouldst thou like to be back amongst the miracles again? Art thou crying out for the manna—the mysterious, the unaccountable manna? Art thou chafing against the old corn of the land because it *is* old, because it is a part of the first laws of nature? Thinkest thou that the gifts of thy God are most valuable when they come in invisible chariots? Thinkest thou that the love of thy God is less precious when thou art able to trace its working? Thinkest thou that the care of thy God is less conspicuous when it is repeated in the same form day by day?

Oh, my soul, thou hast mistaken thy highest joy; not the manna but the old corn is thy glory. God sends not to thee as to Elijah celestial messengers of sustenance, but He

sends thee terrestrial messengers. He sends thee the revolving seasons of nature, He sends thee the love of human hearts, He sends thee the influence of vanished lives. He will not feed thy weak brother with streams of miraculous manna lest thereby He should take from thee the nourishment of being his keeper. He will not send the ravens into the wilderness of thy life lest thereby He should take from thy brother the nourishment of feeding thee. Thou needest not murmur that the supernatural manna has failed, if through the helpfulness of thy human heart God's love now distributes the old corn of the land.

XLVI.

"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him."—REV. i. 7.

A strange thought, surely; why should every eye see Him when He cometh with *clouds*? Do not the clouds *obscure* the sight? Would we not have expected the words to be: "Behold

He cometh *without* clouds, and every eye shall see Him?" Yet bethink thee. It is not said that He cometh *in* clouds, but He cometh *with* clouds. The clouds are not to envelope Him; they are to accompany Him. All the mysteries of life are to follow in His train to prove that they have been all along the servants and ministers of His love. Why is it that to me the God of the Universe often seems to hide His face? It is because the clouds of the universe are seen apart from Him. They are looked at as blots in His handwriting. They are seen as accidents that have marred the plan of His providence. They are felt as influences that have disputed the reign of His empire. But if I could be told that the clouds are *with* Him, if I could be made to feel that they are parts of Himself, modes of His being, features of His plan, workings of His love—if I could be brought to know that, so far from delaying His coming, they are the very chariots in which He comes—then, indeed, I should understand what the seer of Patmos meant. Every eye sees the

clouds of life, therefore every eye shall see *Him* when He is known to be coming with the clouds. All hearts have the revelation of sorrow, therefore all hearts shall have a revelation of *Him* when sorrow is known to be a voice from Him. O Thou that hast made the cloud as well as the sunshine, help me to see that the cloud as well as the sunshine follows in Thy train! Help me to learn that Thou makest the very winds thy ministering spirits! Help me to know that the affliction of time is actually working out the weight of glory in eternity! Let my vision of Thy faithfulness reach even unto the clouds of my earthly day! Show me Thy love in the things I called loveless; show me Thy face as it shines behind the veil!

XLVII.

"Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low."—ISAIAH xl. 4.

Lord, when Thou shalt enter into my soul,
Thou shalt reverse my standard of greatness—

my valleys shall become mountains, and my mountains shall become valleys. Those things which I counted gain shall become insignificant unto me, and those things which I counted insignificant shall appear great gain. I care now for what I shall *seem* to be more than for what I *am*; but then, my being shall be the mountain, and my seeming the valley. To me outward things are now high and inward things lowly; but then the valley shall be without and the mountain within. It is Thou who hast glorified the valleys of life. Thou hast glorified them by dwelling in them; Thou hast touched them with Thy feet and they have burst into flower. The poor in spirit were once the men of the valley; Thou hast made them the men of the mountain. The meek and lowly-hearted were once the dwellers in the vale; Thou hast made them that city on the hill whose light cannot be hid. The bearers of injury were once the type of cowardice; Thou hast made them the most princely of all heroes; Thou hast called them "the children of God."

Inspire me, O Lord, with this heroism of the valleys. Help me to see the elevation of lowly things. Reveal to me the Divine beauty of meekness, of patience, of forgiveness. Show me thine own power—the power of the Cross. Let me see in the valley of Thy Gethsemane the strength of the everlasting hills. Let me learn the life of death, the victory of self-surrender, the joy of sacrifice. The valleys of my heart shall be exalted when the mountain of my pride is brought low!

XLVIII.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” —REV. i. 10.

No day will help thee, if thou art not in the spirit of the day. No outward thing however beautiful would give thee of itself the *sense* of beauty. There might be spread before thee the most gorgeous scene on which the eye ever gazed, and there might be given thee the keenest eye that ever gazed on scene; but it thou hadst not the sympathy in thy soul it

would be all in vain. How often has the day been bright above thee, and yet has failed to give thee a sense of its joy? When the heart is preoccupied with sorrow the beauty of nature is not beautiful; it is almost an offence. It is hard that the sun should shine so bright when thou art bereft and weary. It is hard that the bird should sing when thy heart is weeping. It is hard that the roses should bloom when thy life is withered. So hast thou ofttimes felt, oh, my soul. A mere day will not help thee—not even a Lord's day. The holiest Sabbath rest will be nothing to thee if thou hast not rest within. What to thee are the memorial songs of resurrection if thine own spirit be dead? What to thee are the prayers of the assembled throng if thou hast ceased to feel that there is aught worth desiring? What to thee is the stillness of the outward calm if it is but thy leisure hour for inward strife?

Spirit of the day, spirit of the Lord's day, come into my heart and life! Bring down the sun-

shine and the calm and the worship. Bring down the joy of self-forgetfulness that I may learn the blessedness of thanksgiving. Bring down the resurrection life that I may take up the resurrection song. Make me a Sabbath within that I may behold its mirror without ; then shall my days be in spirit the days of the Lord.

XLIX.

“Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.”—

PSALM iv. 1.

This is one of the grandest testimonies ever given by man to the moral government of God. It is not a man's thanksgiving that he has been set free from suffering. It is a thanksgiving that he has been set free *through* suffering: “Thou hast enlarged me when I was *in* distress.” He declares the sorrows of life to have been themselves the source of life's enlargement. And have not you and I a thousand times felt this to be true? It is written of Joseph in the dungeon that “the

iron entered into his soul." We all feel that what Joseph needed for his soul was just the iron. He had seen only the glitter of the *gold*. He had been rejoicing in youthful dreams ; and dreaming hardens the heart. He who sheds tears over a romance will not be most apt to help reality ; real sorrow will be too unpoetic for *him*. We need the iron to enlarge our nature. The gold is but a vision ; the iron is an experience. The chain which unites me to humanity must be an iron chain. That touch of nature which makes the world akin is not joy, but sorrow ; gold is partial, but iron is universal.

My soul, if thou wouldst be enlarged into human sympathy, thou must be narrowed into the limits of human suffering ; Joseph's dungeon is the road to Joseph's throne. Thou canst not lift the iron load of thy brother if the iron hath not entered into *thee*. It is thy limit that is thine enlargement. It is the shadows of thy life that are the real fulfilment of thy dreams of glory. Murmur not at the

shadows ; they are better revelations than thy dreams. Say not that the shades of the prison-house have fettered thee ; thy fetters are wings—wings of flight into the bosom of humanity. The door of thy prison-house is a door into the heart of the Universe. God has enlarged thee by the binding of sorrow's chain.

L.

" And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set."—GEN. xxviii. 11.

" He *lighted* upon a certain place"—it seemed quite an accident. It appeared to Jacob as one of the trifles of life—a fortunate place for a night's lodging. He only chose the spot for sleeping in ; in the morning he would begin his life again. Little did he know that this sleep itself was to be the true beginning of his life. Little did he know that what he called the *chance* was to be the pivot of his destiny. God's plan was quite different from *his* plan. Jacob tarried there all night only because the sun was

set ; God had made His sun to set there that he might be forced to *tarry* there. The critical moment of his life had come, and it had come at sleeping time ; Jacob's hour of sleep was to be the first hour of his real awakening. In that place on that night he was to have a dream, and his dream was to be his first reality. He was to see a higher birthright than the possession of flocks and herds—a ladder of inspiration whose top reached unto heaven and on whose steps he might climb towards the Infinite. The sloping stones whereon he was to pillow his head were to be transfigured in God's light into a celestial stair ascending from glory to glory. It was worth while to light on such a place to get such a dream !

My soul, never talk of the accidents of thy life. Never say that any spot, however deserted—that any pillow, however stony—has come to thee by chance. The stone thou rejectest may become the head of the corner. The stray moment which thou despisest may be the pivot on which thy fate revolves. The sleep which

thou callest weakness may be the origin of thy princely strength—thy prevailing power with God and man. Tread solemnly the *trifling* paths of existence. Walk reverently through the days that seem to thee without meaning. Uncover thy head in the presence of things which the world calls commonplace, for the steps of the commonplace way may be thy ladder from earth unto heaven.

LI.

“I am the door : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”—
JOHN x. 9.

To go in and out of a house at will is the mark of perfect liberty. It is the mark, not of a servant, nor even of a guest, but of a son ; he who at will goes out and in is conscious that he is a member of the family. Our Lord says that the saved man is the free man—the man who goes in and out at the door. I had always thought it to be the contrary. I had come to

persuade myself that to be saved was to be narrowed, to be curtailed in the path of freedom. I never doubted that the saved man went *in* at the door; it seemed to me that to be in the temple of God was to be about his Father's business. But that this man of all men should have a right to come out again at the same door by which he entered; should have a right to go back into the pursuits of that world from which he came: this was a thought which it did not enter into my heart to conceive. Yet this, and nothing less than this, is the teaching of our Lord. He says that the saved man has alone the right to be called the man of the world, alone the right to come out into the secular pleasures of men. He says that such a man will not only get no harm from the world; he will get positive good from it, "he will find pasture." He will get from the things around him what he has brought to those things—a pure heart. He will see God in everything, because he has seen Him in his soul. He will find good in everything, because he is himself good. He will recognise

in the world green pastures where the world itself recognises only a desert. He will hear the song of birds where the natural ear catches only the silence of the wilderness ; he will behold the myrtle where the eye of sense gazes only on the briar.

My soul, art thou afraid of the Son of Man ?
Art thou afraid to enter in at the heavenly door ?
Art thou afraid that in becoming a Christian thou shalt lose thy power to act as a citizen ?
Thou shalt for the first time gain that power !
Christ shall intensify thy natural gifts ; the rest He gives is the ability to do better that earthly work which has been given thee to do. Dost thou fear that the pleasures at God's right hand will blunt thee to the joys of human affection ? They will quicken them. God's love helps all other love as surely as the vision of the sun helps all other vision. God's love is something to love with, just as the sun's light is something to see with ; it teaches the loveless how to love. He who has been in at the Door is distinguished not merely amongst angels but amongst *men*.

He is marked out by the intensity of his human nature. Thou shalt know him from other men by his superior zeal in all earthly causes. He shall hope more for the world, he shall work more for the world, he shall suffer more for the world ; for it is in the world that he seeks for the pasture which has been provided by the Shepherd-King. He that enters by this Door goes in and out at will !

LII.

“ And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”—GEN. i. 2.

The first act in the creation of the world was the movement of the Spirit ; it came before the light, before the firmament, before the division of land and sea. Ere ever the stars shone, ere ever the flowers began to bloom, ere ever the birds began to sing in the morning air, the Divine Spirit moved.

So, too, is it with the creation of my soul. All things exist for me in vain till the Spirit moves—the light, the firmament, the bird of the

air, the green herb, the face of man. There have been men who have tried the contrary experiment. They have sought to win happiness by grasping outward things. They have got the outward things and they have been miserable. Why is this? What could have been done to the vineyard that has not been done? They have all things that should make men glad; they have the purple and the fine linen and the sumptuous faring every day; why are they not happy? It is because the Spirit has not moved upon the face of the waters. It is peace within, they want—something to calm the sea of the heart. If the sea of my heart be not calm, it is in vain that the outward creation is at peace; its very peace repels me. Why should it be peaceful when I am stormy? Why should it be at rest when I am tossing on the waves? I want something to make my life harmonious with the peace of the visible creation. I am fretted by the calm that seems to ignore the troubles of my inward being. I long to be made *like* these stars in their courses—steadfast, orderly, un-

deviating. I feel that I am not at one with them, and therefore their very beauty is a pain. The power that would heal my sorrows must begin not with my sight but with my soul !

Spirit Divine, Thou art that power ! Thou alone canst make me a new creature, for Thou alone art able to work *within* me. It is not new *things* I want ; it is a new heart, a new life. Come into this heart of mine and give it peace. Come into this life of mine and give it joy. Come and brood over the waters of my spirit until they catch the impress of Thine own image, and subside into Thine own calm. I wait for Thee ! All worlds would not give me what I expect from Thee. Thou canst make all things joys to me. Thou canst make wealth a joy, and Thou alone canst do that. Thou canst make the world a joy, and that none besides Thee *can* do. Thou canst make death a joy ! All things fly from us when we near the waters of Jordan, but Thou broodest over the face even of these waters, and proclaimest a new world begun. Fountain of all life, let me live in Thee !

LIII.

“The Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them.”—GEN. ii. 19.

Why did not the Lord God Himself give them their names? Was not the whole creation called forth by the word of His will? He said, Let there be light, and there was light. He said, Let there be a firmament, and there was a firmament. All the acts of this marvellous drama are the acts of a monarch—all till we come to man. But when we reach man there is a change in the mode of God's government. The tone of imperative command is laid aside and is exchanged for another tone: “Let us make man and let him have dominion.” He brought all the beasts of the field to Adam to see what he would call them, and whatever he called them, that was their name. He accepted the ruling of His creature on a question of natural government; He consented to call creation by the names which man gave to it—to

think with human thoughts. Whence this change in the Divine order? whence this increase of freedom when we reach the human soul? Why does He not deal with me as He deals with the stars—bind me in an orbit which I cannot transgress? Why does He leave so many things to be named and classified and ordered by myself alone, as if in the Universe I *were* alone. It is just because I am not a star, not a mere mechanism of any kind. It is because I have a will, and because without my will I should not exist as man. That which makes me man is the power to give names to things, the impulse to penetrate the secrets of nature. Is it not only fitting, then, that I should be left at times alone? If I were a piece of mechanism I could never move without an impelling hand, but I am a soul, a heart, a mind, a will! I have reason, I have imagination, I have sympathy, and it doth not yet appear what I *shall* be; why should not my Father leave me sometimes to judge alone?

Say not then, my soul, that there is no God,

because at times thou art left to name thine own way. Say not that thou art hid from the Lord, because often thou listenest in vain for an audible voice to tell thee what thou shalt do. It is just because thou art *not* hid from the Lord that no such voice comes to thee. He desires to see by what names thou shalt call things. The heavenly, like the earthly, Father tests the intellect of His child. How shall He test it but by leaving thee a moment to thyself, leaving thee to give a name to what thou seest, to call that which is good, good, and that which is evil, evil. Happy art thou if the Lord God will accept thy names for things. Happy art thou if He shall agree with thee in thy reading of the works of His hands. Then verily thy science shall be a Divine science ; thou shalt be the prophet of nature ; thou shalt be the interpreter of God ; for when thou hast found the true names for the objects of creation, thou art very near pronouncing that Name which is unspeakable.

LIV.

"By it, he being dead yet speaketh."—HEB. xi. 4.

By what? *By his spirit of sacrifice*—that is the secret of Abel's immortality. How fresh to this day is the memory of the man! Hundreds of warriors have lived and died and been forgotten. Hundreds of dynasties have left not a name behind. But this man at the close of six milleniums is a living figure. He still walks in and out amongst us. He speaks to us across the far ages. We are able to commune with him and sympathise with him at the distance of two worlds. What is the cause of this? It is hard for us to enter into the spirit even of the past generation. It is hard for us to catch a kindred chord in the men of the last century. But here is a life that speaks to us through all the generations of time; here is a man that touches our hearts from the birth of all the centuries. Why is this? It is because Abel was great in that part of our being which never grows old—the heart. He was the earliest vic-

tim to the power of love, and the power of love is ever young. He did at the beginning of time what every pure soul has done in all time—he manifested his love by sacrifice. It is his sacrifice that keeps him alive in the world ; it is, indeed, the only thing we know about him. He did no great deeds for his own day. He was perhaps little lauded by the *men* of his day, but he struck the chord that unites all days—the chord of the harp of love. We all know in all ages and climes what *sacrifice* means ; other words may be obsolete, but never that. And when we look upon a sacrificial soul, be it ever so far remote in the mist of years, our spirit recognises a brother, and our whole life goes out to meet him : “by it he being dead yet speaketh.”

My soul, art thou in doubt about thy future? Live the life of Abel and thou shalt have no doubt at all. It is in the spirit of moral sacrifice that the proof of thy future lies. That spirit is itself independent of time and space and change ; it is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is truly called "life eternal," for years cannot touch it. It is that which the world cannot take away when it shifts the scenes. It is impervious to time, and so it is the pledge of immortality. Yield thyself to love and thou shalt doubt no more. In the moment of thy surrender thou shalt become green with immortal youth. In the hour of thy self-forgetfulness thou shalt have passed already from death unto life, for Calvary is the shadow of Olivet, and the spirit of Abel is the Spirit of Christ.

LV.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."—HEB. xi. 5.

Does not this sound something like an anticlimax? To tell us that Enoch was translated is indeed a revelation; but is it not a trifling thing to tell us that before he was taken up to heaven he had an intimation that he was *fit* for heaven—the testimony that he pleased God? One is apt to say: if he got the greater, why

add that he got also the less ; if he was lifted into the presence of God Himself, is it not superfluous to state that he had the consciousness of pleasing God? No ; it is not superfluous ; it is the one thing needed to complete the picture. We talk of being translated into heaven as if that were all that was wanted to make us glad. It would not make us glad at all unless, ere we went there, the joy of heaven were in our souls. To meet God would be no joy to me if I had not previously received the *Spirit* of God. If I were ushered to-day into the presence of some living man of genius, would that be a joy to me? It would depend on the preparedness of my soul. If I were without the spirit of poetry, I would be out of court in the presence of the poet. If I were without the sense of music I would be miserable in the presence of the musician. Even so, if I be without the Spirit of heaven, it would be my greatest misery to be translated into heaven. I would call to the rocks to hide me, and to the mountains to cover me from the face of that august Presence that had

no mirror in my heart. I must know the mind of God ere I can rejoice in the *sight* of God.

My soul, would it be a boon to thee to be translated this day? Bethink thee well ere thou shalt answer. Art thou in sympathy *now* with the joys of heaven? If not, how shalt thou get that sympathy by a mere change of locality? What exile from his country is an exile also from himself? If thou art not *now* heavenly-minded, how couldst thou become so by the mere upward flight in a chariot of fire? Oh, my soul, thou hast need of something before thy translation to make thy translation a joy to thee; the Presence beyond death must meet thee on this side of death.

Spirit of Holiness, Spirit of Truth, take of the things that are Christ's and show them unto me. Let me learn before I die to love the things on the other bank of death; I would not meet them as the objects of a foreign land. Teach me here the rudiments of heaven, that to please God may already be my pleasure, that to serve God may already be my freedom, that to know God

may already be my life ! Inspire me with the love of moral loveliness that the vision of the King in His beauty may indeed be beautiful to me ! Show me the joy of Thy salvation, that the place of Thy salvation may not be to me a pain : this is the inward testimony I want before I go !

LVI.

“ By faith Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”—HEB. xi. 7.

What a humble, what a modest sphere for the exercise of faith ! One would have said that the purpose was quite disproportionate to the work. The ark was a great undertaking, but what was it undertaken for ? To save his own family. Is so narrow a sphere worthy to be the object of faith ? Is so commonplace a scene as the life of the family circle fit to be a temple for the service of God ? I always thought that the family was a secular thing. I always held that the duties of a man's household had nothing to do with his religious duties ; that they

were far too small things to have a place beside the reading of chapters and the singing of psalms. Going to church was the service of God, but to perform the duties of the household was only the service of man. Here is a voice which tells me all this was a delusion and a dream. Noah is bidden to prepare an ark for the saving of his *house*. His whole life on earth is a work for his family, and that is counted to him for a religion ; it is called faith. He is only allowed to have one motive for action—a domestic motive, a commonplace motive, an intensely practical motive—the protection of his family, the sustenance of his sons and daughters ; but because he fills that sphere to the measure of his power, he is reckoned among the company of those who through faith and patience inherited the promise.

My soul, when thou hast finished thy prayers and ended thy meditations, do not say that thou hast left the house of God. If thou art true to thyself thou shalt seek, like the Psalmist, never to leave God's house, but to remain in it all the

days of thy life. God's house shall to thee be everywhere, and thine own house shall be a part of it. When thou enterest into thy home thou shalt feel that thou art going into a temple, a place of Divine worship, an atmosphere of holy service. Thou shalt feel that all the duties of this place are consecrated, that it is none other than the house of God and one of the gates to heaven. Thou shalt feel that every one of its duties is an act of high communion. If thou art breaking thy bread to the family circle thou art fulfilling one form of the command: "this do in remembrance of me." If thou art shedding the warmth of thy love around the domestic hearth, thou art giving to the members of thy household, it may be, their first sense of God. How shall they love the Divine Father except through the image of a human fatherhood? How shall they prize the Divine Brother except through the form of a human brotherhood? How shall they appreciate the revelation of the house with many mansions if their experience of an earthly home has not been suggestive of

peace? Therefore be it thine to make thy house *His* house. Be it thine to consecrate each word and look and deed in the social life of home. Be it thine to build thine ark of refuge for the wants of common day; verily, thy labour of love shall be called an act of faith.

LVII.

"He went out not knowing whither he went."—
HEB. xi. 8.

These words are spoken of the call of Abraham—his call to the secular work of founding a nation. It is a great mistake to think that faith is only needed for religious matters. I cannot take without it one step in life. Think you that Abraham is an exception to the rule of humanity? He is but the illustration of its rule. To all youth as to his youth there comes at one time a call. My aspirations are the call of God to my soul. There are times when God takes me as He took Abraham out into the clear expanse and points me to the stars of heaven, and says :

thou art greater than these, fulfil thy destiny ! But then, unlike Abraham, I am not satisfied with God's call ; I want proof. I am struck with terror by the arduousness of the way that lies before me. I intend with all my heart to go out on my mission of life, but I find such joy in dreaming about it that I would rather postpone the reality. I say : I will go to-morrow, and the morrow of my going never comes. If youth could only act out its dreams it would soon reach its promised land. But youth does not trust its own aspirings ; it is half ashamed of them, it thinks them too good news to be true. It is unwilling to begin the journey of life by the light of faith alone. It feels strength enough for to-day, but not for to-morrow, and therefore it will not go on. How is it to get past that big cloud in to-morrow's sky ? How is it to overleap that barrier in the middle of the coming week ? How is it to surmount that obstacle on the threshold of the next year ? Can *faith* tell it that ?

No ; or it would not be faith. Faith never

reveals the *how*; it leaves that for sight to do. Faith points on to the *end* of the process; it is for reason to show the means. My soul, thou shalt never learn the hidden strength of to-morrow until thou hast used the strength of to-day. It is only by going out without knowing the whither that the whither itself shall be revealed to thee. There is a reserve power sleeping in thy heart and waiting for the moment of need. Go out to meet the moment and the power shall come! Go out in faith, believing in the unseen door that shall unbar at thy approach to let thee through! Go out undaunted by the coming vision of Mount Moriah's sacrifice! Verily, when thou reachest it thou shalt find what now thou seest not—that God Himself hath provided for thy sacrificial hour!

LVIII.

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”—JOHN xii. 32.

Yes, it is Thy dying which hath vanquished all hearts. Only Thy cross of death could prove

Thy love universal. The crosses of Thy life bore the burdens of special sufferers ; we have not all special sufferings, but we must all die. Thou hast borne in Thy dying the common penalty of our nature, sinless Thou hast reaped the wages of sin, Thou hast touched the one sad chord that makes the world akin. Therefore, Thou Crucified One, we cling to Thee in Thy crucifixion. Thou art here the meeting-place of our united souls. We gather together to meet Thee in the dolorous way. We load Thee with our burdens, and Thou carriest them alone into the valley, and on the other side we see Thee come out unburdened, and we know that we are free. Thou hast done more by what Thou hast borne than by what Thou hast wrought. All our human frailty weighted Thee at that hour, all our load of sin weighed down Thy spotless soul.

The revelation of Thy strength only becomes perfect to me in the climax of Thy weakness. Thou art never so strong to me as when I hear it said of Thee : " He saved others, Himself He

cannot save !” Oh, omnipotent impotence !
Oh, strength that could restrain strength ! Oh,
glorious surrender of glory ! I bow myself to
Thee. I bend beneath the majesty of the still
small voice. I see Thee lifted up not *from* Thy
humiliation, but *by* Thy humiliation ! Thy cross
hath crowned Thee, Thy gentleness hath made
Thee great ! The thorns that wreath Thy brow
have become a laurel wreath, green with the
reviving hope of myriad human hearts. Thou
art wearing our thorn, Thou art sharing our
cross, Thou art bearing our burden, and in the
joys of our frailty made Divine, our souls rise up
to meet Thee uplifted in the majesty of death !

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